



FOOD SAFETY ACROSS THE LIFE CYCLE

TOXOPLASMOSIS



What is Toxoplasmosis?

Toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by a parasite. You can get it by eating undercooked, infected meat, or handling soil or cat litter that contains the parasite. Most adults have no symptoms because their immune system usually keeps the parasite from causing the illness. However, this can be a problem for pregnant women or anyone who has a weakened immune system.



How can it affect my unborn child?

You may not have any symptoms but, you can pass the infection to your baby before he or she is born. Most infants who are infected during pregnancy have no symptoms at birth, however, they may develop serious medical conditions such as blindness, deafness, mental retardation, seizures, or cerebral palsy.

How do I know if I have been infected?

Your health care provider may suggest a blood test.



Is treatment available for Toxoplasmosis?

Pregnant women or others who become infected can be treated with medications. Mother and baby should be watched closely during the pregnancy and after the baby is born. Talk with your health care provider if you have any questions.

How is Toxoplasmosis spread?

Cats play an important role in spreading toxoplasmosis. A cat becomes infected by eating birds or other small animals infected with the parasite. It is then passed in the cat's feces where it can live for up to 3 weeks. Toxoplasmosis can live in buried cat feces for up to 18 months. You can be contaminated by touching your mouth after cleaning a litter box or while gardening without gloves. Fruits and vegetables can be infected from the soil or water. It is important to wash fruits and vegetables before eating.

Other animals such as pigs, sheep and deer become infected when they eat feed that comes in contact with cat feces. The parasite is then in the animal muscle. People become infected when they eat undercooked meat or by handling the infected raw meat.



How can I avoid infection?

- Wash your hands with soap and water after handling soil, sand, raw meat or unwashed fruits or vegetables.
- Cook all meats completely. The internal temperature of the meat should reach 160°.
- Freeze meat for several days before cooking to reduce the chance of infection.
- Wash all cutting boards and knives with hot soapy water after each use.
- Wash all fruits and vegetables before eating them.
- Wear gloves when gardening or handling sand from a sandbox. Wash hands afterward.
- If you are pregnant or have a weakened immune system, have someone else change the cat litter.
- Avoid drinking untreated water.



For additional information contact:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—www.cdc.gov
- USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service—www.fsis.usda.gov
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration—Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition—www.cfsan.fda.gov
- www.FoodSafety.gov
- 1-800-SAFEFOOD
- Partnership for Food Safety Education—www.fightbac.org
- Your physician
- Your local public health department
- KY Food Safety Branch - (502) 564-7181 or <http://chfs.ky.gov/dph/info/phps/>



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